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Culture of peace

Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Security Council
Sixty-third year

Letter dated 29 February 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose, in my capacity as Chair of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Group at New York, a statement issued by the OIC Group expressing concern about the increasing manifestations of Islamophobia (see annex). The repeated instances of Islamophobia encourage incitement to hatred against Islam and Muslims around the world and pose a threat to peace and security within and among States. These acts call for redoubling the efforts of the international community to promote understanding and respect for religions, cultures and civilizations.

It is requested that the annexed statement of OIC kindly be issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 49 and 70 (b), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Munir **Akram**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 29 February 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Organization of the Islamic Conference statement on Islamophobia

29 February 2008

The increasingly negative political and media discourse in the Western world targeting Muslims and Islam is a matter of grave concern for the Islamic Ummah. Over the years, the growing intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, and insults against Islam have become pervasive and are often condoned in certain Western countries and communities.

Among the instances of Islamophobia are the publication of blasphemous caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) by newspapers in Europe, multiple campaigns for anti-Islamic regulations in several European countries including the imposition of restrictions on the construction of places of worship, and the impending screening of a documentary by a Dutch lawmaker, which insults the Holy Quran. They constitute incitements to negative sentiments and hatred against Muslims. Apathy, and inaction on the part of the Governments concerned in preventing such provocations and discrimination against Muslims and Islam, cannot be justified by the plea of freedom of expression. Unfortunately, such insults and intolerance against Islam are being provided intellectual justification by Western scholars and political lobbies who espouse anti-Islamic agendas, hence lending support to ideological violence against Muslims. Slogans such as "Islamo-fascism", "Islamic terrorism" and "radical Islam" are manifestations of and justifications for provocations and systematic insults against Islam. This phenomenon reflects the Islamophobia which afflicts segments of Western society.

The OIC Group believes that the right to freedom of expression carries with it special duties and responsibilities, and does not provide a licence to insult and hurt the sentiments and beliefs of others. It is the obligation of all States parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in accordance with article 20 thereof, to enact the necessary legislation to prohibit any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. The OIC Group observes that the European Court of Human Rights has previously ruled in favour of interference by the State to prohibit media material in cases involving other religions to guard against igniting religious sensitivities, and expects equal treatment in cases involving Islam and Muslims' rights.

The OIC Group in New York strongly deplores all acts of ideological and physical violence and assaults, and incitements thereto, against persons on the basis of their religion or belief, and those acts directed against the holy symbols, sites or places of worship of all religions. The Group is particularly and deeply alarmed by the intensification of the campaign of defamation against Islam, as it impairs Muslims' enjoyment of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and impedes their ability to observe, practise and manifest their religion freely and without fear of coercion, violence or reprisal.

Such acts against Muslims and Islam are inconsistent with the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations which seeks to promote peaceful coexistence among nations. They are in violation of numerous United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolutions 62/154 on combating defamation of religions and 55/23 on the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, as well as Security Council resolution 1624 (2005), which call upon all Member States, inter alia, to continue international efforts to enhance dialogue and broaden understanding among civilizations, in an effort to prevent the indiscriminate targeting of different religions and cultures. Such acts also erode the positive momentum generated by the launch of the Alliance of Civilizations and the General Assembly's High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace, which, inter alia, aim to overcome misunderstandings between Islam and the West.

In the above context, the OIC Group in New York wishes to recall the joint statement of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union in Doha on 7 February 2006, in which it was recognized that "in all societies there is a need to show sensitivity and responsibility in treating issues of special significance for the adherents of any particular faith, even by those who do not share the belief in question".

In particular, the OIC Group believes that lack of action to prevent the reprinting of blasphemous caricatures, and indifference in airing the inflammatory documentary against the Holy Quran, will be perceived as manifestations of insincerity towards the principles and objectives of various efforts within the United Nations system aiming at promoting understanding and respect of and among cultures and civilizations.

The OIC Group urges the Secretary-General to call upon the Governments of the States that condone the publication of these blasphemous caricatures and media material as well as the campaigns for anti-Islamic regulations to take all possible legal and administrative measures to prevent the repetition or continuation of these deliberate offensive acts, which impinge greatly on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion of the followers of Islam. The OIC Group requests the Secretary-General to publicly express his unequivocal opposition to all acts of Islamophobia, and to declare that no Government should be complicit in undermining the ongoing efforts to promote harmony and friendly relations among the various cultures, religions and civilizations.